

PRESS RELEASE



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ATTENTION: NEWS EDITORS

November 14, 2012

2012 VOTE BOOSTS WOMEN'S SHARE OF CONGRESSIONAL SEATS

Washington — Women won seats in the U.S. Congress in record numbers in the 2012 U.S. elections, giving them the strongest representation they have ever held in the nation's legislative branch of government.

In the U.S. Senate in 2013, 11 newly elected women will join nine female incumbents who did not face re-election this year. Those 20 women, one in five of the total Senate membership, represent the greatest number to ever reach the chamber, which likes to call itself "the world's greatest deliberative body."

Senator Barbara Mikulski, center, is joined by other female senators on stage at the Democratic convention in September.

The political action committee Emily's List is devoted to supporting women candidates at all levels of office, and the Senate progress is an "amazing milestone," said Emily's List President Stephanie Schriock. "We've increased the number of women in the Senate tenfold in the last 20 years."

In the U.S. House of Representatives, where all 435 members face re-election every two years, women candidates have had more chances over the years to gain seats. The 2012 races sent 59 female incumbents back to office, to be joined by 18 newly elected women. That total of 77 edges past the previous record of 73 female representatives. The number of women newcomers elected in a single year is higher than it has been since 1992.

The female contingent in the House of Representatives has seen some ups and downs in recent years, but Schriock is convinced this year's gains are "here to stay."

The state of New Hampshire bet everything on female candidates in 2012. This northeastern state becomes the first ever to send an all-female congressional delegation to Washington, according to the Center for American Women in Politics. That's two women in the Senate and two in the House.

New Hampshire voters also elected a woman as governor.

U.S. women and those in other nations face many of the same challenges in winning elective office. Society and culture historically have cast them in a domestic role. Women are often not as assertive as men in putting themselves before the public. Women frequently have a more difficult time gaining the financial backing required to mount a campaign.

But U.S. women in growing numbers are finding ways to overcome those obstacles, and when they do, Schriock says, the voters welcome their arrival on the political scene.

“Voters sent a clear message [on Election Day] that they’re tired of a backwards-looking agenda that hurts women and families,” Schriock said in an Emily’s List press release.

A couple of conservative male candidates running for the Senate made headlines with controversial remarks about rape and abortion this year and angered many women voters. Some advocacy groups charged that, if elected, these candidates would be intent upon limiting women’s reproductive rights. Some analysts said those controversial incidents sharpened women’s incentive to vote.

President Obama gave a widely noticed endorsement to women as lawmakers at an event last April. “Is it possible that Congress would get more done if there were more women in Congress?” he asked. “I think it’s fair to say: That is almost guaranteed.”

Maryland Senator Barbara Mikulski is a female lawmaker who has been trying to get more done for 36 years in the U.S. Congress. Beginning her career in the House of Representatives, she was first elected to the Senate in 1986, and is now known as the dean of Senate women. As in years past, she will welcome new female members with a “power workshop,” focusing on how to get things done, how to pursue a favored issue and best serve constituents.

“So it’s like a Popular Mechanics workshop for getting started in the Senate and being successful in the interest of your constituents,” Mikulski said in an interview, days after the 2012 election results revealed the numbers of new female lawmakers who will be coming to Washington.

She said women lawmakers maintain a dual focus on major national and international issues while they watch out for the down-to-earth domestic issues that matter to families.

“While we look at the macro issues related to war, peace, balancing the budget, we also worry about the people balancing the family budget,” said Mikulski, the daughter of a grocer with Polish ancestry. “And that’s why we want to focus on public education, public schools that you can count on, access to higher education, health care that you can rely on.”

2012 has been an important year for Mikulski. Last March, the duration of her congressional service surpassed the record for any other woman ever elected. Her colleagues lauded her impassioned advocacy of her favorite issues and an easy sense of humor, but she focused on her constituents, saying, “It’s not only how long I serve, but how well I serve.”

As she prepares to become the senior leader of the largest contingent of congressional women ever, Mikulski is still focused on the people. In that post-election interview this week she said: “So we’re going to square our shoulders, put our lipstick on and help move America forward.”

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